

The UK Educational Context - Failing to Keep Students in School

Pre-school, nursery and child care are available privately for babies and children up to 4 years old. Those with money can afford it. There has recently been some Government funding to enable parents to claim 30 hours of child care a week, but there has not been enough for everyone to access it.

Primary school is mandatory for all children from 4-11 years of age whilst secondary school is mandatory for all children from 11-16 years of age. A school day is typically from 9am to 3pm and there is a subject-oriented curriculum, attainment targets and testing throughout.

Schools range in type. There are still some schools that in effect are owned by the 'state' under Local Authority control. Parents can apply to go to a range of local schools, but places are usually awarded on catchment area limiting the choice for many children. The performance of these schools varies greatly. Some schools are set up as 'Academies' and these are owned and funded by private individuals or organisations. Parents do not have to pay fees for these schools, but there may be entry criteria in terms of ability or religion. There are also private schools which are fee paying schools. This, in effect, creates a three tier system of education.

The school curriculae have become increasingly knowledge oriented, and assessments are based on remembered facts. Personal development, citizenship, social skills, cultural awareness and other such 'softer' subjects have been squeezed out as has project based cross-curricular work. In addition, teaching and learning strategies now dictate how lessons should be taught, reducing teacher professionalism and freedom to respond to the needs of students.

At 16 a young person must decide whether to continue in school, transfer to a Further Education College, or learn in a different setting. Education in one form or another is mandatory until 18.

On the whole, students with additional needs are included in mainstream school, 'special' schools were mostly disbanded in the 1980's although some remain for particularly high or complex need children/students. This means that teachers are working with much wider ranges of abilities and needs within a classroom.

Class sizes hover at around 30 children / students making them difficult to manage.

The increasing diversification of the UK population means that many students have English as a second language and teachers may have students with 15 different first languages in a classroom.

Students who have poor behaviour can be excluded for a set period of time. If poor behaviour persists they may be transferred to a Pupil Referral Unit where children / students with poor behaviour can be more securely looked after.

Many students who do not enjoy going to school will pay truant (i.e. not attend). Some hang out and hide, others get into other trouble. Parents are taken to court and fined if their children do not attend school.

At 18 a young person has the choice of continuing their education in a Further Education College or University with fees of up to £9000 per year, or starting an Apprenticeship where fees and a small salary are paid (but places are limited), entering the world of work, or unemployment.

As university programmes require students to pay fees, they have in effect become private. Many students have been deterred from studying by the £27,000 + debt with which they can leave university. The commercialisation of HE has added pressure to Universities to produce results that are published in league tables, notably the survey of National Student Satisfaction and the University Leavers Employability Survey.

There are clearly issues with this system of structures as demonstrated by the following key facts.

Total number of students in schools (4-18years)

- There are a total of 8.56 million pupils in schools in England (ONS, 2016).

Bullying

- There are no official statistics on the number of children who are bullied. But from research studies and from what children tell us, we know that bullying is an issue that affects almost all children in some way (NSPCC, 2017).
- There were over 24,000 Childline counselling sessions with children about bullying in 2016/17 (Bentley et al., 2017)
- More than 16,000 young people are absent from school due to bullying (Brown et al., 2011)
- Over half of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have experienced homophobic bullying at school (Guasp, 2012)
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Exclusions

In the year 2015-2016 (ONS, 2017):

- 6,685 children and students were permanently excluded across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools. This corresponds to around 35.2 permanent exclusions per day, equivalent to 8 pupils per 10,000.
- Most (81 per cent) permanent exclusions occurred in secondary schools. The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools is 0.17 per cent, equivalent to 17 pupils per 10,000.

- 339,360 children and students received fixed period exclusions across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools. This corresponds to around 1,790 fixed period exclusions per day, equivalent to 429 pupils per 10,000.
- Of those pupils, with at least one fixed period exclusion 59.6 per cent were excluded only on one occasion, and 1.3 per cent received 10 or more fixed period exclusions during the year.
- The average length of fixed period exclusions across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools was 2.2 days.
- The highest proportion of fixed period exclusions (45.7 per cent) lasted for only one day. Only 13.3 per cent of fixed period exclusions lasted for one week or longer.
- Just over a quarter of all permanent exclusions were for pupils aged 14, and pupils of this age group also had the highest rate of fixed period exclusion, and the highest rate of pupils receiving one or more fixed period exclusion.
- Boys were over three times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion and almost three times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than girls
- Pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM) were around four times more likely to receive a permanent or fixed period exclusion than those who are not eligible
- Pupils with identified special educational needs (SEN) accounted for almost half of all permanent exclusions and fixed period exclusions
- Pupils with SEN support had the highest permanent exclusion rate and were almost 7 times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than pupils with no SEN
- Pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or with a statement of SEN had the highest fixed period exclusion rate and were almost 6 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than pupils with no SEN
- Pupils of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage ethnic groups had the highest rates of both permanent and fixed period exclusions, but as the population is relatively small these figures should be treated with some caution
- Black Caribbean pupils were over three times more likely to be permanently excluded than the school population as a whole. Pupils of Chinese and Asian ethnic groups had the lowest rates of permanent and fixed period exclusion.

Truant

- The last full report on truancy was in 2006 (since then it has been amalgamated into general absence figures. This showed that: 23% of 11- to 16-year-olds had missed lessons since starting state secondary school. Among the top 10 reasons for children taking time out of school was boredom or being taken out of school by their parents (Smart Technologies, 2006).

- This has led to about 7,500 parents taken to court each year but only a handful receiving custodial sentences.

Free School Meals (ONS, 2016).

- In January 2016, 14.3% of pupils were eligible for and claiming free school meals (ONS, 2016).

Ethnic groups in schools (ONS, 2016).

- In primary schools, 31.4% of pupils are of minority ethnic origins. Minority ethnic pupils made up 71% of the increase in pupil numbers in primary schools between 2015 and 2016.
- In secondary schools, 27.9% of pupils are of minority ethnic origins.

English as a Second Language (ONS, 2016).

- In primary schools, 20.1% of pupils are exposed to a language known or believed to be other than English in their home.
- In secondary schools, 15.7% of pupils are exposed to a non-English language in their home.

Special Educational Needs (ONS, 2016).

- There are 1.23 million pupils with SEN in schools in England. This represents 14.4 percent of all pupils. Of these, 237,000 have a statement of SEN or EHC plan (2.8% of all pupils) and 992,000 have SEN Support (11.6% of all pupils).

Higher Education Statistics (Universities UK, 2017):

- In 2015-16, there were 2.28 million students studying at UK higher education institutions. 1.84 million were UK students, 127,440 from the EU and 310,575 from non-EU countries.
- Figures from 2015-16 show that more than 90% of graduates were in work or further study within six months of leaving university.
- In 2016, working age (aged 16 to 64) graduates earned on average £9,500 more than non-graduates.
- The latest National Student Survey, published in 2017, found that 84% of students were satisfied with their course.
- In 2016, 19.5% of 18-year-old English-domiciled young people from low participation neighbourhoods entered higher education
- In 2016, English pupils receiving free school meals were 78% more likely to go to university than they were in 2006
- The number of full-time undergraduates from black and minority ethnic groups rose by 38% between 2007-08 and 2015-16.

References

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